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Title: Dasein and *inter-esse*, or how event is design

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Keywords: Dasein; design; event; space

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Dasein and *inter-esse*, or how event is design

Anton Heinrich Rennesland¹

Abstract

I provide an insight into Being's self-realization, emphasizing *inter-esse* as event as a twofold designal quality in resoluteness and a propensity toward the other. Primarily working on Henk Oosterling's Premsela lecture, I consider Dasein as an event realized through what Oosterlink captures as the *inter-esse*, a realization of firstly unreflective everydayness and secondly one's craftsmanship which fills the spaces between individuals. Being becomes self-reflexive through intersections; *inter-esse*'s disclosiveness is the event in dwelling. Dwelling makes possible an intersection of existence – a realization of everyday life and of encountering both the human and nonhuman other – that fundamentally equates Dasein with design. This I argue creates a pivotal perspective to consider how shared reality is fundamentally a shaping of one's existence in the world, how existence is a designing of the world. Space constitutes the event for which Being discloses itself, that Dasein re-understands itself through this designal quality.

Keywords: Dasein; design; event; space

On 1 April 2009, Henk Oosterling delivered the fifth Premsela lecture entitled "Dasein als design Of: Moet design de wereld redder?" ("Dasein as Design Or: Must Design Save the World?") at the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. The Premsela lecture series are annual addresses given in honor of Benno Premsela, a leading Dutch designer, to discourse on the current state of design.² What is extraordinary in Oosterling's lecture is his catchy association of Dasein with design. This play of words presents a serious consideration of Peter Sloterdijk's much earlier emphasis on the *in-ness* of being-in-the-world.³ The focus is

the direction Heidegger proceeds with following his introduction of such; sections 12 and 13 of his *Sein und Zeit* present the essential elements to this state of Dasein – *in-the-world*, *entity*, and *Being-in* – yet is ultimately followed by a hermeneutical approach to what it is to be subjected to knowing the world.⁴ Sloterdijk began work on this with his spherology as his own recovery of that untrodden path of Heidegger. Being and space are worthy of our consideration yet not solely on an analytical level but rather an existential one, which is where Oosterling's lecture comes in since he portrays a distinctive element of existence:

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² See "Premsela lecture," <https://premsela.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/en/activities/premsela-lecture>.

³ See Henk Oosterling, "Dasein as Design, Or: Must Design Save the World?", trans. Laura Martz, *Premsela lecture 2009* (Premsela 2009), 3 and Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres I: Bubbles, Microspherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (South Pasadena, CA: Semiotext(e), 2011), 333ff.

⁴ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 79 and Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 340-341.

being designs space, being is design in space. What I seek to do in this essay is to present the inter-relational character of Dasein's design-quality; I present the two ways Oosterling frames *inter-esse* yet go beyond his presentation to correlate these with Heidegger's association of existence and dwelling. Though Oosterling's equation of Dasein and design already provides a differed reading of Dasein, what I wish to do is to take this a step further and associate design to a twofold understanding: a resoluteness in face of the ambiguity found in everydayness but at the same time a renewed attention precisely to the everyday in which relations to others arise. Such an association is what I wish to portray as an event (of encounter) in this designial state of Dasein. This is what I ultimately tie to the concept of event (*Ereignis*) as "the way in which the givenness of given beings – including ourselves – comes into question for us" which in face of contemporary questions to design is a double "apocalypse" as revelation and disaster to Dasein qua design.⁵

Oosterling begins his lecture by stating the commodified and consumed status of design. In a world that has equated the designial quality with mere functionality, design is a need.⁶ A brief narrative then follows of design's development to exhaustion (signaled by the 'end of art thesis') and the seemingly necessary shift to today's multi-media amalgamation. We currently experience design multifacetedly from being mere consumers to designers. Design is a need, yes, but it is one that I myself am able to address. This is evidenced by how one does

not have to rely on any intermediary in various transactions (real estate and the stock market to name a few) and can even, with a great amount of perseverance, become an interior designer and a city planner through intersections of media. Such an admission is not to trivialize these professions but rather to show how one today is directly brought closer to others. The former role of the genius as the font of knowledge has slowly been lost in the rubble of interconnectivity, interdisciplinary study, and the internet. Design is a need, yet it is more than mere function. It is our capacity to make sense of the world we live in.

In raising several elements in the previous paragraph, my hope was to stress the ubiquitous prefix *inter* for me to proceed with Oosterling's *inter-esse* which he supposes as the interior of Dasein qua being-in-between.⁷ He supposes a fundamental realization of Dasein's authenticity as this natural propensity; a proportionate realization of one's resoluteness and a greater degree of care (*Sorge*).⁸ Oosterling works on Sloterdijk's presentation of the relational character of being-in-the-world. Although Heidegger discusses Dasein in the singular, Sloterdijk's spherology unfolds as an insight into the systems or spheres which support Dasein.⁹ We therefore have this progression in terminology: from being-in-the-world (Heidegger) to being-in-spheres (Sloterdijk) to being-in-common or being-in-between (Oosterling).¹⁰ Being-in-the-world is fundamentally a tempting state of Dasein.¹¹ However, I ascribe temptation not solely in relation

⁵ Richard Polt, "Ereignis," *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus Mark A. Wrathall (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 383-384.

⁶ See Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 1.

⁷ See *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 238.

⁹ See Allan Parsons, "Sloterdijk," *Course Compendium* (accessed 02 November 2021), <https://narrative-environments.github.io/CourseCompendium/Sloterdijk.html> and Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 5.

¹⁰ See Henk Oosterling and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "General Introduction" in *Intermedialities: Philosophy, Arts, Politics*, eds. Henk Oosterling and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 1-2.

¹¹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 221.

to the world but to the state of Being-In. Regardless of world, sphere, or in-betweenness, there is this in-ness that is tempting for an individual to simply fall into. It is a temptation to not make sense of being-in. Oosterling does not mention this, yet I would posit that it is against this backdrop that designing ought to be understood for as *inter-esse* is being-in-between, designing conditions us to resist the temptation to be part of Anybody (*das Man*). With this in mind, we approach how Oosterling presents *inter-esse*: a realization of firstly unreflective everydayness and secondly one's craftsmanship which fills the spaces between individuals.¹² This two-tiered development conjures a different approach to being *in* the world and how design plays a role in this.

On the first level, we confront a seemingly quotidian and non-reflective mood of radical mediocrity.¹³ This type of existence banks on the amplification of time over space via multimedia's proliferation through various platforms, highlighted by the speed at which messages travel today because of the internet. However, this type of hyper-engagement with media comes at the price of falling into ambiguity. We are reminded of Heidegger's depiction of such as part of one's in-ness alongside idle talk and curiosity.¹⁴ This state of ambiguity refers

to one's relation with others yet more fundamentally with one's very self. It is an embrace of two perceptions of clarity (literally, *Zweideutigkeit*) of how to live life. This leads us to realize one's precariousness evident in one's loss in the rubble of meaning: one has become a stranger to oneself, the loss of homelessness and rootedness.¹⁵ In a rather strong way of saying it, it is a reduction of Dasein to Anybody, a reduction to the state of being fake, of being everyone yet no one.¹⁶

This quotidian state of ambiguity is ramified today by multimedia, empty messages multiplied through various channels. We may thus read Oosterling's presentation of being-in-between as a critical counterweight to radical mediocrity. In face of the abundance of multimedia, this new form of being is mindful of the space for a critical encounter with the other. It is not a passage of one into another but rather a *between* that peculiarly relies on the tensions less of time and more of space.¹⁷ Contrary to the state of homelessness, such an intermediary brings one out of oneself toward the other. Design is understood here as an unthrowing in the state of thrownness.¹⁸ Literally, a little play of words reveals to us how design (*Entwurf*) stands in opposition to fallenness (*Geworfenheit*). One is brought out of oneself to un-fall yet is

¹² See Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 6-8.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 217-219.

¹⁵ See Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966), 48-49.

¹⁶ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 165 and Romualdo Abulad, "Filipino Postmodernity: Quo Vadis?," *Kritike* 13, no. 2 (December 2019): 44, https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_25/abulad2_december2019.pdf.

¹⁷ See Henk Oosterling, "A Culture of the 'Inter' Japanese Notions ma and basho," in *Sensus Communis in Multi- and Intercultural Perspective. On the Possibility of Common Judgements in Arts and Politics*, eds. Heinz Kimmerle and Henk Oosterling (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), 70. Oosterling posits how this notion of *inter* is similar to Deleuze's *becoming* which recognizes a traversal of planes of immanences within a transcendental field rather than a mere transition from one to another. (See Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman [New York: Urzone, 2001], 25-26.) Where they differ though is that Oosterling's approach to this transcendental field, to borrow Deleuze's term, is in relation to a political (*inter*) ontology (*esce*) in relation to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* rather than a metaphysical analysis that would be more proper to Deleuze. (See Henk Oosterling and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, "Introduction to Part Three," *Intermedialities*, 115.)

¹⁸ See Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 3.

¹⁹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 233.

not led to homelessness. Anxiety for Heidegger is the state of uncanniness (*unheimlichkeit*), of losing one's sense of dwelling.¹⁹ This is the state of unease in face of the in-ness of the world. What I bring forward in discussing this is this bridge to the concept of dwelling which Oosterling does not proceed to. My reading of this everydayness that is the ground of radical mediocrity is the same everydayness that dwelling ought to be sourced from. In *inter-esse*, one is brought out of oneself and is able to dwell.

Explaining this leads us to consider the second level of *inter-esse*. In his Prensela lecture, Oosterling specifically deals with craftsmanship in a particular context of the encounter of design and the avant-garde in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* through the impressions of the Bauhaus and De Stijl or the encounter of art and Architecture (with the capital A) through Hendrik Berlage and Theo van Doesburg.²⁰ What we source from this is how their particular craftsmanship differs from mere productivity especially in the latter section of Oosterling's lecture in which he criticizes the mass consumption of design. Craftsmanship as the encounter of design and the avant-garde or of art and Architecture signifies an intersection between design and meaning-formation. This is a rather vague concept in Oosterling's lecture which I make tangible by referring to the reaction of John McAndrew, curator of the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Architecture and Industrial Art, to the reception of the 1938 Bauhaus exhibition:

Modernistic, then, should apply to works which imitate superficially the forms of **modern** art, reducing them to decorative mannerisms. "Modernistic decoration"

accurately describes the cubistic mirrors of the Show Shoppes but not the forms of typical Bauhaus objects which were the honest result of a study of their function, the material they were made of and the process by which they were manufactured. **Modernistic** is too valuable a word to be sacrificed as a sloppy substitute for **modern**.

The Bauhaus had almost nothing to do with streamlining, or it was not ordinarily engaged in designing objects which had to move efficiently at high speed.²¹

McAndrew opposes the observation of critics that the Bauhaus was a font of modernistic elements that streamlined design. He tries to correct such a position and asserts that the Bauhaus upheld a modern attempt at underscoring function in this order: the form's determination from the object's use, the object's materiality, the process of manufacture, then its creation. McAndrew ends his short piece with the praise that the Bauhaus creations "were never meant to be 'in style' or 'the last word of 1926,' but were honest and often distinguished."²² Its distinction is the mark of the Bauhaus craft. I use this point on the Bauhaus craft as representative of Oosterling's second consideration of *inter-esse*. It is an illustration of the remarkable distinction that the encounter of design and the avant-garde or Architecture entails. It is not a pseudo attempt at apprehending everyday life but rather a determinate and conscious effort at meaning-formation.

My bridge from Oosterling's lecture to Heidegger's notion of dwelling is further ramified by this second level. Craft is opposed to mere production for the latter implies speed while

²⁰ See Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 8-9

²¹ John McAndrew, "'Modernistic' and 'Streamlined,'" *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 5, no. 6 (Dec 1938). Emphasis retained.

²² *Ibid.*

the former, a certain habituation (*Gewöhnung*) that does not bank on time but space. *Gewöhnung* itself implies the space where one dwells (*Wohnung*) or habituates (*Wohnen*). This is reminiscent of Heidegger's emphasis on dwelling especially against the backdrop of the chaos of thrownness in the world. His words are clear: "to build is in itself already to dwell."²³ He emphasizes that both words (build and dwell) have the same root, *bauen*, which eventually spells out as building and dwelling but also as preserving and cherishing. It is a cherishing of the world and of one's everydayness – the intersection which serves as the entry into a habituated life. My own take of Oosterling's craftsmanship is this habituated life in the everyday, a type of dwelling, of cherishing and preserving the everyday. From Heidegger's perspective, thrownness is representative of the chaos in the world, yet this chaos is made sense through design, as the above etymological play reveals.

Therefore, I would say that *inter-esse* stands as the intersection of design and everyday life, of care and dwelling. It is not about traversing or streamlining experiences but about cherishing them and finding meaning in what one is doing. Thus, Oosterling lastly points out how responsibility is the hallmark of craftsmanship.²⁴ It is a responsibility not just for oneself or for compensations for one's craft but rather a responsibility toward humanity since design is a fundamental need and one's craft contributes to design in toto. Craft emerges when the designer is responsible for one's design and, similar to the process observed in the Bauhaus' design, is mindful of a product's intersections with life as a whole when one realizes

life's designal quality.

For the remaining part of this piece, we are brought to ponder on the event in this designal theory. Oosterling briefly sketches design's self-critical history following the end of the guild system in the late 1700s: design's embrace of industrial values ("How does it look?"), its association to status through its link to mass media ("What does it mean to me?"), and the shift to interactivity or multimedia ("How does it work between us?"); such a progression raises three questions to indicate the common understanding of design as a development from form, content, to context or from syntax to semantics to pragmatics.²⁵ Oosterling outlines design's reception by society which underscores the fact of design's status as a need. Yet, we ought not to merely reduce design to what is common to all for it is the expenditure that is common not the *inter-esse* that makes design fundamentally what it is.

Inter-esse once again is being-in-between. It is the unravelling of design as the event of the equation of existence and design through a critical consciousness. This is why the last question in design's development ("How does it work between us?") serves as the link to Heidegger's consideration of event. It would be too strenuous to provide a straightforward definition of *Ereignis* in the sense of self-unfolding, but I wish to frame this in relation to dwelling. Dasein as design may be understood between *beyng* – not as *ousia* which is common to all – and the fourfold's balance in dwelling.²⁶ I begin with the first point. What is common to all is design's consumption, yet this remains an important feature since radical mediocrity provides us the vantage of everyday life. It is

²³ Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writing from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking* (1964), ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins Publisher, 1993), 348.

²⁴ See Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 12.

²⁵ See *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²⁶ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), §34 and Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 352-353.

through this perspective of the quotidian that design can be understood, that life's designal quality can come to the fore through craft's relations. There is enormous potential in the quotidian which profoundly informs design, be it in a literal sense through the creation of gadgets or furniture to a socio-political plane of urban planning. Everyday life should not be reduced to the biological function or be associated with simply a mindless observance of trivial activities. The thinker of everyday life, Henri Lefebvre, has words worthy of serious attention:

The concept of everydayness does not therefore designate a system, but rather a denominator common to existing systems including judicial, contractual, pedagogical, fiscal, and police systems. Banality? Why should the study of the banal itself be banal? Are not the surreal, the extraordinary, the surprising, even the magical, also part of the real? Why wouldn't the concept of everydayness reveal the extraordinary in the ordinary?²⁷

I add this remark from Lefebvre to bring us beyond Oosterling's presentation. As beings-in-common, we partake in Being, or rather Being is realized through a shared-ness of everyday life. Yet, as Heidegger distinguishes Dasein and Mitsein, we must not immediately conflate the two. Mitsein is a characteristic of Dasein.²⁸ Dasein's resoluteness conditions its quality of relation qua Mitsein. I invoke this difference to elucidate a commentary on Dasein as design. Dasein's designal quality is not

simply its relational status to another but rather its resoluteness in face of chaos and a realization of the tensions within *inter-esse*.

I bring Lefebvre's appraisal of the everyday in the discussion as a shift from Heidegger's usage of everyday life as the publicness of Anybody to highlight the evental opportunity in the everyday. Oosterling claims, "Design is a gift you give your relations, and, as such, always accompanied by performance."²⁹ The everyday is full of these performances (in contrast to simply understanding them as movements) that contribute to design in toto. Design, thus, is not merely the aestheticization of material components or the imposition of form over matter. It is *inter-esse* in that it moves beyond a singular *ousia* or essence and an understanding of this essence's existence between diverse ones. Parenthetically, this reminds us of how Sloterdijk defines being as the sum of all transactions.³⁰ Although Sloterdijk's take on this intermediary is in relation to his psychopolitical thrust between debt and generosity, it is providential for us to consider how the everyday can unfold.

The everyday is where the possibility of the second point arises; dwelling is possible once the everyday is given attention to. My mention of the event (*Ereignis*) here is a rewriting of it in relation to design. *Ereignis* showcases the event as design not from a shared entity but rather as a realization of the tensions of forces in life. It is a gift in that it "establishes or confirms a relationship" yet is ambiguous in requiring to be in proportion to the relation and invites a certain sense of exchange in same proportion.³¹ Design is fundamentally rooted in one's resoluteness in making sense

²⁷ Henri Lefebvre, "The Everyday and Everydayness," "The Everyday and Everydayness." *Yale French Studies* 73, Everyday Life (1987): 8. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930193>.

²⁸ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157.

²⁹ Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 13.

³⁰ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Rage and Time: A Psychopolitical Investigation*, trans. Mario Wenning (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 30.

³¹ Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 13.

of the ambiguity and thrownness of existence. It is a realization of the relational character of each individual, a relation to *beyng*, to oneself, to others, and even to the nonhuman. These are various relations that cannot be reduced or identified to each other yet require a certain sense of balance among them. *Ereignis* is the twin occurrence of the realization of one's resoluteness in face of ambiguity and thrownness and of one's inter-relationality not just with others but with the whole of existence. The event is the moment of disclosure. It is for this reason I associate it to dwelling as the enowning of one's relations within and without the interplay of forces.

I conclude this piece with a clearing: I have deliberately delayed providing a singular definition to design throughout this piece for I first sought to fortify the everyday as its necessary intermediary. Such is the reason that Oosterling provides the equation of Dasein and design, and although I begin with his lecture, I go beyond it through an intersection with Heidegger's dwelling, my presentation of a Bauhaus observation, and a shift of the everyday from Heidegger to Lefebvre. Furthermore, I liken the equation of Dasein and design to the moment of *Ereignis* to underscore a twin occurrence of design as resoluteness and an unthrowing mindful of the other. I have done so with the idea of Heidegger in mind of a turn from an association to Anybody to a participation of Being in reality, validity, inquiry, and above all in care.³² I invoked a shift in understanding the everyday from Heidegger to Lefebvre as a turn from ambiguity to resoluteness since this is required for "Dasein as design [to become] medially reflective" for "creativity no longer lies within individuals but between them."³³ To design is fundamentally to exist and to be conscious of such an existence. It is

only when the understanding of life's designal quality turns reflective does one understand *inter-esse*.

What this provides us is an understanding of design that is dialectically engaged with the everyday. The event is that realization of the design's disclosure through the *inter-esse*, the intersections of Being with itself on an existential – the everyday – level. It is through the everyday that design arises in how each orders oneself and also through craft that is dialectically affirmed by the crafter and by the recipient of the craft. Oosterling reminds us that "everyone is a designer, even though the gesamtkunstwerk remains unfinished. Everyone's life is thrown-design, however unintelligent."³⁴ We are all in the world, yet a total intersectional design is yet unfinished. Life's designal quality is disclosed through its eventual state: *beings-in-common*. "Design, then, equates to making decisions about form in order to liberate ourselves from the arbitrariness of life."³⁵ This creates a pivotal perspective to consider how shared reality is fundamentally a shaping of one's existence in the world, how existence is a designing of the world, a movement from Heidegger's everydayness captivated by Anybody to Lefebvre's everydayness with an utmost potential of disclosure. In the end, we are left not simply with the equation of Dasein and design but their association to *Ereignis*, finding ourselves at the *inter-esse* as the event of this equation.

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³² See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 26–27 and 227.

³³ Oosterling, "Dasein as Design," 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

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